

Alabama Lied To Me! Uncovering Alabama's Public Memory

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Overview

Public memory is not limited to just statues and monuments, but legends as well. “Alabama Lied to Me: Uncovering Alabama Public Memory” aims to analyze two popular Alabama legends to uncover the motives behind the legend.

Mardi Gras Public Memory

The current narrative is that Mobile, Alabama is the “Birthplace of Mardi Gras,” instead of New Orleans, Louisiana.



Figure 1. A float sponsored by an Alabama Tourism company featuring the claim to the first Mardi Gras.

Noccalula Public Memory

The current narrative is that a “Cherokee Indian Princess” named “Noccalula” jumped over the waterfall to avoid an arranged marriage.

Mardi Gras Key Findings

The historical data suggests that while Mobile did have the first mystic societies, the town paraded on New Year's Eve, not Mardi Gras. New Orleans celebrated Mardi Gras with a parade prior to Mobile.



Figure 2. The Statue of “Princess Noccalula” at Noccalula Falls park in Gadsden, AL.

Noccalula Key Findings

The historical data suggests that the legend is false. “Indian Princesses” do not exist and her name was not “Noccalula.” The latter versions of the poem romanticize and dehumanize the Indigenous Peoples.

Conclusion

I argue that the difference in the legends versus the factual history is because both venues are tourist locations and having an appealing story adds to increased tourism. Since Mobile, AL is smaller and less known than NOLA, the claim of “the first Mardi Gras” could appeal to travelers. Although the beauty of the waterfall and park may appeal to some, the popularity and name are generated from the local legend. Both places use said incorrect legends to generate revenue.

References

Available upon request.

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